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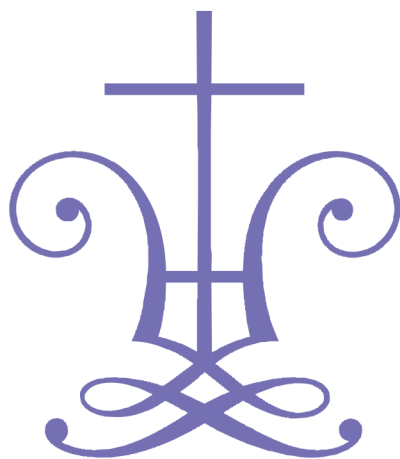
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Journal of Theological Interpretation

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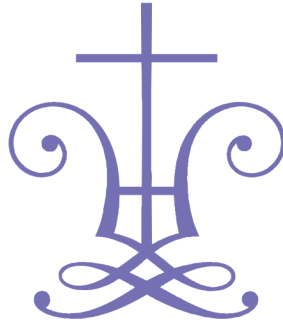
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Theological Thinking and the Reading of Scripture: An Auseinandersetzung with Susannah Ticciati

R. W. L. MOBERLY
DURHAM UNIVERSITY

Abstract — This article considers the relationship between the Bible and theology via the work of Susannah Ticciati, who works with the Bible from the perspective of theology. An exposition of Ticciati's account of election and divine jealousy in Rom 9–11 and Deut 32 highlights the role that a postbiblical understanding of creation *ex nihilo* plays in Ticciati's readings of Scripture. Questions are raised about criteria whereby this sort of theological perspective can be recognized to illuminate, or to skew, a reading of the biblical text. The understanding of clean and unclean in relation to Israel's election in Lev 20 and Acts 10 is proposed as an issue that may pose difficulties for Ticciati's reading of election. Ticciati's work is seen to pose issues of theological hermeneutics in an unusually clear and interesting form.

Key Words — *Susannah Ticciati, election, creation ex nihilo, clean and unclean, Romans 9–11, Deuteronomy 32, Acts 10*

The Bible is fundamental to Christian theology. So far, so uncontroversial. But as soon as one tries to be more specific about the relationship between Bible and theology, consensus disappears.

One of the most famous statements of what has become a characteristic core understanding in modern biblical scholarship is Johann Gabler's 1787 inaugural lecture, *De justo discrimine theologiae biblicae et dogmaticae regundisque recte utriusque finibus* ("An Oration on the Proper Distinction between Biblical and Dogmatic Theology and the Specific Objectives of Each").¹ To be sure, it was not that one could not in principle do both biblical and dogmatic theology, and Gabler certainly saw the former as a preliminary to the latter. However, the tasks were in principle distinct and

1. See John Sandys-Wunsch and Laurence Eldredge, "J. P. Gabler and the Distinction between Biblical and Dogmatic Theology: Translation, Commentary, and Discussion of His Originality," *SJT* 33 (1980): 133–58; also, with further bibliography, in Ben C. Ollenburger, ed., *Old Testament Theology: Flowering and Future* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 497–506.



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sequential, and they were not to be confused. This point of principle has generally remained, even as Gabler's own distinctively 18th-century way of envisaging its implementation faded into history. One consequence of this in-principle division between the properly biblical and the properly dogmatic is that in practice the two tasks have increasingly tended to drift apart. The biblical scholar, at any rate, has increasingly attended to the nature and meaning of the biblical texts in their ancient contexts, with questions of constructive theology addressed as something of an afterthought, if at all.

Of course, such an apparently neat division has consistently met with distinguished resistance. From the 19th century, Søren Kierkegaard and Martin Kähler come to mind. In the 20th century Karl Barth and Rudolf Bultmann led the way in insisting on holding together, in diverse modes, what Gabler's trajectory tends to put asunder. The 20th century ended with hermeneutical theorists such as Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, and biblical scholars such as Brevard Childs, proposing fresh conceptualities. It is within this general context of resisting the separation of theological truth from biblical meaning that it is most appropriate to locate the work of Susannah Ticciati.

TICCIATI ON THE GRAMMAR OF ELECTION AND JEALOUSY IN ROMANS 9–11

Ticciati does not go for an easy life when, as a theologian, she works with Scripture. In her doctoral dissertation, she tackled the book of Job.² More recently, she has been working on Paul's account of Israel in relation to God's purposes in Christ in Rom 9–11.³ It is on these two essays on Rom 9–11 that I will focus here. In Rom 9–11, Paul cites Israel's Scriptures extensively, in such a way that substantive issues in the interpretation of both Old and New Testaments are raised, and the theological interpretation of both Testaments is important to Ticciati's work.

In general terms, Ticciati's understanding of the role of Scripture in theology is clearly and powerfully expressed: "If theology, in relating everything to God as the source and telos of all being, engages people in their greatest depths, it does so, when drawing on Scripture, by searching the depths of Scripture: by articulating its deeply embedded patterns of reasoning in their healing and transformative power."⁴ Moreover, with ref-

2. This has been published as Susannah Ticciati, *Job and the Disruption of Identity: Reading beyond Barth* (London: T&T Clark, 2005).

3. Idem, "The Nondivisive Difference of Election: A Reading of Romans 9–11," *JTI* 6 (2012): 257–78; idem, "Transforming the Grammar of Human Jealousy: Israel's Jealousy in Romans 9–11," in *The Vocation of Theology Today: A Festschrift for David Ford*, ed. Tom Greggs, Rachel Muers, and Simeon Zahl (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013), 77–91.

4. Idem, "Transforming," 78–79.

erence to her indebtedness to her *Doktorvater*, David Ford, she speaks of their common “desire always to turn back to the scriptural source” with a “trust that every time it will yield abundant and surprising fruit.” At issue is a “non-reductive approach to Scripture and willingness to learn from all other interpretations, with no limits being placed on Scripture’s richness,” an approach rooted in a “belief in the infinite richness of the God to which Scripture witnesses.”⁵

For her specific reading of Rom 9–11, Ticciati is clear at the outset about the basic theological conceptuality that informs her approach:

In *Knowing the Unknowable God*, David Burrell shows that, in order properly to characterize “divinity as distinct from whatever else there is,” “what is needed . . . is a distinction which makes its appearance, as it were, within the world as we know it, yet does not express a division within that world.” For the divine difference, as it has also been called, is “unlike any other which we make to understand things in the world, for each of these, however formal, presumes the world as its background.”⁶

Ticciati’s prime purpose is to give an account of the nature of divine election according to Paul in Rom 9–11 in a way that does justice to Burrell’s notion of the divine difference. Although it is of course possible to understand Israel as “just another nation,” and so the distinction between Israel and the nations as “a merely creaturely division in the world,” Ticciati argues that it is also possible to understand Israel as “the Israel of *God*” in such a way that it “is therefore to be distinguished from other nations as God is to be distinguished from the gods of the nations—and thus expresses no mere creaturely difference.”⁷

Her core thesis in her reading of Paul’s argument is that “the election of Israel displays the God who cannot be described as ‘this God rather than that God,’ but altogether transcends creaturely distinction.”⁸ More fully:

In its exclusion (as a turning point on the road to its salvation), Israel does not lose its God but finds its God as the God who is also the God of others. This God cannot be possessed as “my God” as opposed to “yours,” nor is God simply shared between Israel and the nations. Rather, God is Israel’s God precisely *as* the God of others. Paradoxically, God belongs all the more intensively to Israel as the God who does not belong to Israel.⁹

5. Ibid., 79.

6. Idem, “Nondivise,” 257. The reference is to David Burrell, *Knowing the Unknowable: Ibn-Sina, Maimonides, Aquinas* (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1986), 2, 17, 3.

7. Ticciati, “Nondivise,” 258.

8. Ibid., 273.

9. Ibid., 271.

This does not do away with the difference between Israel and the Gentiles, for the Gentiles share in Israel's God "derivatively and therefore differently." Although Paul's account shows Israel's distinctiveness to be "inherently inclusive," there remains differentiation within this inclusiveness, an "irreducibility of otherness":

In sum, both Jewish and Gentile differences are needed together for the manifestation of the divine difference. Articulating both together, we can say that the difference God makes in God's election of Israel is not one that divides (the chosen from the unchosen), but one that unites across the difference and differentiates within the unity. God is the God of Israel precisely as the God who cannot be possessed, unlike the gods of the nations who are shared and divided between them. Gentiles are invited to share in this God, but derivatively and differently, and therefore not in a way that collapses the difference of Israel. In sum, God, in electing Israel, does not make a particular difference, but rather changes the very grammar of difference: unity and difference are brought into relation such that unity no longer implies uniformity and difference no longer implies division.¹⁰

Ticciati reads the whole of Rom 9–11 carefully, and engages both with textual details and with relevant secondary literature (in which she has read widely). For now, however, it is not possible to do more than highlight her main arguments and conclusions.

In terms of method and approach, she suggestively proposes that the well-known difficulty of holding together Paul's argument as a whole ("Is he coherent?" "Is he consistent?") represents "the rhetorical marks left on the text by the theological problem of the divine difference."¹¹ Her reading of Rom 9–11 as a whole consistently displays her sense of Paul's attempt to do justice to a divine difference that transcends all familiar human distinctions: "the way in which Paul holds divine and human distinctions in creative tension . . . the tension [that] must be kept in play in order to point to the elusive divine difference."¹² Or, until the end comes and "all Israel will be saved" (Rom 11:26), "the distinction between Israel and the Gentiles—if it is to manifest the divine difference—must be caught up in the dialectic sustained by Paul in the trajectory from 9:1 to 11:24."¹³

One particular issue within the text on which she focuses as the necessary corollary of her thesis about election is jealousy, both human and divine (which is present in both essays, but is the particular focus of the second essay). The language of jealousy appears three times in Paul's argument—Rom 10:19 (citing Deut 32:21 LXX); 11:11, 13–14—and clearly plays a

10. Ibid., 272–73.

11. Ibid., 258.

12. Ibid., 265.

13. Ibid., 266.

weighty role in Paul's thinking about Israel and salvation: "Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry in order to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them" (11:13–14). Jealousy is a well-known human phenomenon, which is naturally understood in divisive and competitive terms. Ticciati notes that standard modern commentators on Rom 9–11 consistently understand Paul's account of jealousy in such competitive terms, and she fully recognizes the *prima facie* plausibility of a "plain sense" reading that "God is using human competitiveness to the mutual benefit of the competing parties."¹⁴ Nonetheless, she regards this as a "thin description," at odds with Paul's consistent reworking of apparent division in terms of divine difference. By way of contrast, she argues that "God's provoking of Israel to jealousy is his transformation of the grammar of human jealousy."¹⁵

As she reads the biblical text, Ticciati is clear that the key issue "is not so much a question of philology as one of hermeneutics. How is the God of the Old Testament to be understood—through what hermeneutical lens?" Given her basic theological premise ("God is not just another character within the drama of salvation history, but the source, impetus, and telos of this salvation history"), it follows that "while anthropomorphic language cannot be avoided (indeed it is all we have to work with), it cannot be understood anthropomorphically." She situates herself "in the tradition of exegesis of the likes of Tertullian and Origen, acknowledging the necessary humanness of our language about God, but also the fact that when it is used in the divine context it accrues meaning appropriate to the divine."¹⁶

The biblical basis for her construal of jealousy is Paul's citation of Deut 32, the Song of Moses. Ticciati notes that Paul's first invocation of Israel's jealousy (Rom 10:19) includes a citation of Deut 32:21 (LXX), the full text of which reads: "They made me jealous with what is no God, provoked me with their idols. So I will make them jealous with what is no nation, provoke them with a nation lacking understanding" (NETS). Although this is "arguably just a minor note in Deuteronomy," Paul expands it into a central theme (and arguably "has in mind the whole Song" because his argument in Rom 9–11 "recapitulates its broader narrative pattern" from election through sin and judgment to salvation). The key point of significance in Deut 32:21 lies in the fact that "Israel's jealousy is here paralleled with *God's* jealousy. Should we not be open, therefore, to its taking on a different dynamic from human jealousy more generally, insofar as it comes to reflect God's own distinctive jealousy?"¹⁷

How then should the divine jealousy provoked by Israel's idolatry be understood? Ticciati argues on the basis of an understanding of the nature

14. Ibid., 268; cf. idem, "Transforming," 81.

15. Ibid., 78.

16. Ibid., 84.

17. Ibid., 81, 82.

of creation—creation *ex nihilo*, as interpreted by Rowan Williams, and evoked in the OT by Ps 139, Job 38–41, and Gen 1—that one should think in terms of “a relationship between God and creation in which God is the whole context and presupposition of creation, such that creation has no independent standpoint from which it can struggle against God, even in its rebellion.” In the light of this, “any autonomy gained in contradistinction to God’s can only be an illusion. Evil only corrupts the creature and thus is better described (if it can be at all) as a struggle of the creature against itself.”¹⁸

It follows from this that one should not think of Israel’s idolatry as envisaging autonomous creaturely agency, such that the creature “can choose to take or leave God, running off with foreign gods.” For “if God is the whole context of creaturely being, then there is no taking leave of God. God cannot be threatened by such desertion, or by the third party [other gods/idols] that tempts to desertion.” To say this, however, does not mean that “God is indifferent towards Israel’s coming and goings.” How then should the divine jealousy be understood? The basic point, as already noted, is that language used of God “accrues meaning appropriate to the divine.” Thus, “God’s ‘jealousy’ transcends both creaturely passion and creaturely impassivity” and “is most appropriately reinterpreted as God’s radical orientation towards Israel’s well-being”: “God harnesses everything for the good of Israel, even when God does so in ways that are incomprehensible to it, bringing into question the devices and desires of its own heart. But the result will always be Israel’s liberation, and specifically, its liberation from idolatry. It is just such liberation in which Deuteronomy 32 culminates.”¹⁹

If this gives an indication of what it means for God to be jealous, when nothing can be a threat to God’s sovereignty, what, according to Paul, does it mean for Israel to be jealous in the light of God’s turning to the Gentiles? Ticciati develops the point that in Deut 32:21 (LXX), as already cited, Israel’s jealousy comes in the context of God’s jealousy. Israel’s jealousy should thus be understood to be shaped noncompetitively by the distinctiveness of the divine jealousy:

Israel’s God, as we learn from the nature of God’s jealousy in Deut 32, is not one whom it could possibly lose to another, for God is not one suitor among others but is the very context of Israel’s freedom and identity, radically oriented toward Israel’s well-being. By the same token, this God has the capacity—without diluting his relationship with Israel—to enter into relation with other nations, because God is not a finite creature among others who could be fought over and divided up between them but is the infinite context of them all.²⁰

18. Ibid., 84, 85; cf. idem, “Nondivisive,” 270.

19. Idem, “Transforming,” 85.

20. Idem, “Nondivisive,” 270–71.

It follows that "Israel's jealousy is bound up with its recognition that its God is also the God of the Gentiles. If jealousy normally involves the desire for exclusive possession, in Israel's case, its jealousy, as desire for *this* God, must take the paradoxical form of the desire to embrace the God who is also the God of others and relinquish the God who is (exclusively) its God." Thus, to conclude this exposition where we began, Ticciati argues that according to Paul's account in Rom 9–11: "This God cannot be possessed as 'my God' as opposed to 'yours,' nor is God simply shared between Israel and the nations. Rather, God is Israel's God precisely *as* the God of others. Paradoxically, God belongs all the more intensively to Israel as the God who does not belong to Israel."²¹

On this account, both Israel's election and Israel's jealousy are to be understood consistently as noncompetitive and nonpossessive in Paul's account.

TOWARD AN EVALUATION OF TICCIATI: DEUTERONOMY 32 AND THE NATURE OF DIVINE JEALOUSY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

How best should this reading be evaluated? At the outset, I should register significant agreements. For example, I like the methodological proposal that the difficult mode of argument is a reflection of the intrinsic difficulty of its subject matter, the struggle to articulate the "divine difference" of the ways of God with Israel and the Gentiles; and I am persuaded by the particular construal that "the only failure of Israel . . . is its non-allegiance to Christ, or its unbelief."²² However, I would also like to probe a little, and hopefully, among other things, elicit further clarification from Ticciati herself as to how best to evaluate this reading of Rom 9–11.

So as to try to have a sharp focus, I want to highlight Ticciati's use of Deut 32 in relation to election and jealousy. Although in her general discussion of Rom 9–11 she engages with a wide range of scholarly literature, here she solely interacts with a single monograph, Richard Bell's *Provoked to Jealousy: The Origin and Purpose of the Jealousy Motif in Romans 9–11*,²³ apart from a passing reference in the second essay to a dictionary article on the root *qop-nun-alep*, classically translated "jealous" or "zealous."²⁴ This may of course simply indicate that Ticciati's study is a work in progress (her earlier work on Job engages extensively with the literature and issues of OT

21. Ibid., 271.

22. Ibid., 276.

23. Richard Bell, *Provoked to Jealousy: The Origin and Purpose of the Jealousy Motif in Romans 9–11*, WUNT 2/63 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994).

24. The reference (Ticciati, "Transforming," 84) is to H. G. L. Peels, "qana," in *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem Van Gemeren, 5 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 3:937–40.

scholarship).²⁵ Nonetheless, without prejudice to what she may yet write, I would like to reflect on her handling of the OT in this project as it currently stands.

Particularly significant is Ticciati's comment on the account of Israel's liberation from its enslavement to gods who are no gods in Deut 32:36–39:

One could, of course, read this as God's competitive triumph over rival gods, in which he violently takes Israel back to himself. But this would be to understand his power and sovereignty on the model of human rulers, who must gain power *over* their rivals and subjects. But if God is not just another force alongside creatures (in which case his difference from them would be just another division within the world) but rather the context for all creaturely life, then divine power is not an imposition from without. It is, rather, the source of creaturely freedom and identity [footnote reference to Rowan Williams]. In that case, God's jealousy cannot involve a competitive rivalry with Israel's suitors (God's being merely the most powerful suitor). Instead, it is most appropriately envisaged as God's radical orientation toward Israel's well-being; his harnessing of everything for the good of Israel (even when this is in ways that are incomprehensible to Israel, as is the case within Rom 9–11).²⁶

Moreover, Ticciati sees Paul's reading of Deut 32, although of course a re-reading in the light of Christ, to be drawing out something that was already present in the text: "*This truth was already there in Deuteronomy 32*, but it is sounded at a new and heightened pitch in Christ, as God expands his covenant to include the Gentiles"; "the Christ-event, instead of bringing about a binary opposition between old and new Israel, reveals *and renews* a non-divisive difference between Israel and the nations, Jews and Gentiles."²⁷

I would like to come at this via the typical concern of the biblical scholar with doing justice to the biblical documents in relation to their context of origin: What do the biblical texts mean as ancient texts from, say, the seventh century BC or the first century AD? To be sure, this typical concern has tended to marginalize questions of high importance about the recontextualization and appropriation of the biblical documents in Christian and Jewish frames of reference, and as such has contributed to the problem to which contemporary interest in theological interpretation is seeking to respond. Nonetheless, because this concern has been fundamental to the development of biblical studies in the modern world, it still needs to be taken seriously by those who seek to complexify and transform

25. Ticciati also sounds the caveat: "While the task of establishing the nature of divine jealousy within the HB is beyond the capacity of this article, I will nevertheless offer a limited but suggestive reading of it within the context of the Song of Moses" (Ticciati, "Nondivisive," 269).

26. Ibid., 270.

27. Idem, "Transforming," 89, emphasis added; idem, "Nondivisive," 276.

the categories of interpretive debate. It represents the concern not only of the philologist and the historian to do justice to ancient texts in their own right but also of many a theologian who wants to hear Scripture as far as possible in its own voice without accommodating it to the possibly self-serving preferences and prejudices of its readers.

Because Ticciati is so well aware of the general nature of modern biblical scholarship, I imagine that it may well be with a provocative twinkle in her eye that she undertakes to read Rom 9–11, and Deut 32, in the light of Burrell's account of the "divine difference" and of "creation *ex nihilo*, as interpreted by Williams." For Ticciati knows full well that creation *ex nihilo* is generally recognized as a postbiblical doctrinal formulation (and I am sure that she has no desire to contest this), and that Burrell is reflecting on the enduring legacy of high medieval philosophical theology as articulated in the interaction of prime Jewish, Christian, and Muslim thinkers. And she knows that to use postbiblical doctrine in the interpretation of the biblical text is, in the eyes of many scholars, to commit the basic error of anachronism, the error of inappropriately mingling biblical thought with postbiblical dogmatic thought in a way that means that the Bible is not rightly heard on its own terms. Ticciati knows that anachronism can be a problem that skews interpretation, and she herself makes good use of the importance of not being anachronistic when she disposes of those who would charge Paul with any form of Christian anti-Judaism.²⁸ But the question may be asked: does her use of creation *ex nihilo*, with its conceptual refinement by Burrell and Williams, open her also to the charge of misreading or skewing the sense of the biblical text, albeit in a distinctive way?

A simple objection to Ticciati's reading could therefore be formulated thus: what if the ancient biblical writer *did*, to a greater or lesser extent, envisage God's power and sovereignty on the model of human rulers? The fact that subsequent theology came to resist this sort of notion does not entail that the biblical writer did also. One must be open to recognize where biblical thought resists accommodation to postbiblical thought.

There are at least three *prima facie* possible responses that might be offered to this objection. First, the difference between OT and subsequent thought is only apparent rather than real; a noncompetitive understanding of jealousy is in fact the intrinsic meaning of the OT text. Second, the OT and subsequent understandings are indeed radically different; but this need not matter for Christian theology, the logic and integrity of whose understandings need to be evaluated by criteria other than conformity to biblical meanings. Third, there are various forms of mediating position, to the effect that whereas the later (postbiblical) understanding may indeed not be that of the biblical writer, it nonetheless stands in continuity with the biblical meaning, such that it is extending and developing the biblical

28. *Ibid.*, 273–74.

subject matter rather than changing it (operating with a text- and reader-hermeneutic more than with an author-hermeneutic). Because the first option might be rather hard to establish, and because the second option would relativize the importance of Scripture for theology in a way that is at odds with Ticciati's high evaluation of the theological significance of Scripture, I imagine that it would be the third option, in one form or other, that would be most promising for understanding Ticciati's approach.

Even if the key issue is "not so much a question of philology as one of hermeneutics," the question remains of *how* to hold philology and hermeneutics together in ways that are mutually illuminating rather than allowing them to drift apart with the result that their relationship becomes tenuous or forced. Put differently, in terms of Ticciati's categories, there is surely a real question whether the difference between Israel and the nations expressed by Israel's election in the OT is not indeed a division within the world that separates the chosen from the unchosen in creaturely categories.

ELECTION AND THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN CLEAN AND UNCLEAN

An interesting example of some of the issues at stake may lie in the connection between Israel's election and Israel's dietary laws, in terms of the need to eat clean but not unclean animals. In Lev 20, Israel's distinguishing between the clean and unclean is to emulate God's own action in separating Israel from the nations:

I am the LORD your God; I have separated you from the peoples. You shall therefore make a distinction between the clean animal and the unclean, and between the unclean bird and the clean; you shall not bring abomination on yourselves by animal or by bird or by anything with which the ground teems, which I have set apart for you to hold unclean. You shall be holy to me; for I the LORD am holy, and I have separated you from the other peoples to be mine. (20:22–26)

The distinction between clean and unclean animals symbolizes a distinction between Israel, implicitly a clean nation, and other peoples, implicitly unclean nations. The holiness of Israel is a facet of their elect status, which is to be symbolized in the everyday act of eating. (To be sure, in historic and contemporary practice Jews have understood the dietary laws in further categories also. Nonetheless, insofar as the practice of *kasbrut*, itself a rabbinic development of the biblical material, has been retained, its biblical logic has not been abandoned. Eating according to *kasbrut* is in important ways a symbolic act, symbolic of Israel's elect and holy status before God).

This issue is illuminated by the most famous and extensive engagement with the issue of clean and unclean animals in the NT, in a narrative that explicitly depicts a retraction of the clean and unclean distinction in the light of Christ—the story of Cornelius and Peter in Acts 10. The story

opens with Cornelius, a devout and God-fearing Gentile, in prayer. He is given a divine vision in which he is told that God has heard his prayers. He is then instructed to summon "a certain Simon who is called Peter," who is at a particular house in Joppa. He duly sends off three trustworthy men to find this Simon Peter. The scene then shifts to Peter, who is also at prayer and also receives a vision:

He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air. Then he heard a voice saying, "Get up, Peter; kill and eat." But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean." The voice said to him again, a second time, "What God has made clean, you must not call profane." (10:11–15)

It is a memorable scenario. The divine voice tells Peter to ignore and/or transgress the scriptural dietary restrictions. Unsurprisingly, Peter declines to do so, for that would mean being fundamentally false to his Jewish identity and allegiance. But the divine voice then says that it is acceptable for him to eat, for God himself has abolished the distinction between clean and unclean by making the unclean clean. We may note that God does not explain how or when the unclean has been made clean, just that this is now the case. We may also note that Peter does not actually have to kill and eat, but rather is left to ponder the meaning of the vision in a state of being "greatly puzzled."

At this point, the men sent by Cornelius arrive. Peter, still puzzling over the vision, is given an explicit divine instruction: "Go with them without hesitation; for I have sent them." When Peter speaks with the men, he learns that they are from a godly Gentile, Cornelius, who had received a divine direction to summon him; and he provides hospitality and then goes with them. When Peter arrives at Cornelius's home, he says to him, together with his assembled family and friends: "You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without objection. Now may I ask why you sent for me?" (10:28–29). Cornelius tells his story, and Peter responds by speaking of Jesus, though prefacing what he says with these words: "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him" (10:34–35). Peter's words about Jesus are then accompanied by the Holy Spirit's coming upon all who heard him. Peter's companions are astonished "that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles," and Peter duly instructs that Cornelius with his family and friends be baptized on the grounds that "these people [Gentiles] . . . have received the Holy Spirit just as we [Jews] have" (10:47).

The intrinsic meaning of the sequence of events is admirably grasped and articulated by Peter. He was given a vision of clean and unclean *animals* and told to eat without making any distinction. He subsequently tells Cornelius that God has shown him that he should not call any *person* profane or unclean. That is, Peter understands the logic of Lev 20:24–26, that clean and unclean animals symbolize clean and unclean peoples, and that it is this logic that has been set aside by God.

Perhaps surprisingly, neither Peter nor the narrator explicitly amplify or clarify the words, “What God has made clean (*ekatharisen*) you must not call profane.” Jesus on one occasion said something about what people eat, and its inability to defile a person, a saying on which Mark commented that he thereby “declared all foods clean” (*katharizōn panta ta brōmata*, Mark 7:19). However, it is highly unlikely that a single saying of Jesus, which was addressed to general issues of defilement and not to dietary laws and which is unmentioned by Luke, could be envisaged as the moment of God’s “making clean.” Even though the saying was seen by Mark as apparently applying to dietary laws, this is an interpretation in retrospect, quite possibly after a recognition on other grounds that food laws no longer applied to the followers of Jesus in the way that they had applied previously; Mark sees this new state of affairs as already implicit in Jesus’s teaching. In the context of Luke–Acts, Peter’s speaking about Jesus and the consequent descent of the Holy Spirit surely indicate that the logic of making clean is bound up with Jesus and the Spirit. In terms of Luke’s overall narrative we should probably think of the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus and the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost as that time when God “made clean” what hitherto had been unclean, a reality whose fuller dimensions are now being disclosed. The crucified and risen Jesus opens the historic people of Israel to Jew and Gentile alike through the Holy Spirit, and in so doing makes unnecessary the dietary laws that hitherto had symbolically set apart Israel from Gentile nations.

There are of course specific questions that can be asked about the relationship between the understanding of Israel’s election in Lev 20 and that in Deut 32, and also about how the understanding of the difference that Jesus makes to Israel’s election is distinctively articulated in Luke–Acts and in Paul. In general terms, however, Ticciati’s thesis about Israel’s election as not expressing “a creaturely difference” that is “a division within the world” surely needs greater clarification in relation to the differences of portrayal of election in Old and New Testaments.

BIBLICAL READING AND CREATION *EX NIHILO*

From among other questions that may also (much more briefly!) be asked, I raise just two, one in this section, and one in the next. First, how best should a postbiblical doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* be utilized in read-

ing the Bible? Ticcianti sees the doctrine as implying “a relationship between God and creation in which God is the whole context and presupposition of creation, such that creation has no independent standpoint from which it can struggle against God, even in its rebellion.” As a result of this, “evil will thus have to be interpreted in a very particular way, not as an independent principle, or as the rebellion of an autonomous creature; indeed, any autonomy gained in contradistinction to God’s can only be an illusion. Evil only corrupts the creature and thus is better described (if it can be at all) as a struggle of the creature against itself.” Within the OT, she sees this sort of understanding of God as “evoked” by Ps 139, “portrayed” by Job 38–41, and “implied” by Gen 1.²⁹ I presume that the purpose of these biblical references is not to seek in any way to establish creation *ex nihilo* on a biblical basis but rather to suggest that certain weighty biblical passages are open to being read in a way that is consonant with the concerns of creation *ex nihilo*. Would this then mean that creation *ex nihilo* should be understood somewhat along the lines of the double love commandment, that is, as a fundamental perspective to be brought to bear on all else as a way of reading and appropriating it, even if the material on its own terms might not be so understood? This could be promising, though it surely requires further clarification, not least in relation to the issue of criteria by which one might recognize whether at least sometimes this sort of perspective might skew, rather than illuminate, the subject matter of the biblical text.

TOWARD THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF PAUL’S READING OF ISRAEL IN ROMANS 9–11

Second, Ticcianti argues for a reading of Paul whereby Israel remains Israel and Gentiles remain Gentiles in the light of Christ, but in such a way that their irreducible difference does not prevent them from being united nondivisively in God. My question relates to how far this is a reading of Paul on his own terms in Rom 9–11 and how far this is a rereading of Paul in the light of the formation and persistence of Judaism and Christianity as distinct continuing realities through until today and perhaps specifically in the light of contemporary Jewish-Christian dialogue in the context of Scriptural Reasoning.³⁰

For it is doubtful whether Paul envisaged anything like what has actually happened. Paul relates his discussion of Israel to the nature and purpose of his own ministry (Rom 11:13–14), and he sees the pattern of disobedience and mercy as being realized in his context of ministry. This is especially brought out by the thrice-repeated “now” (*nun*) in the climax

29. Ticcianti, “Transforming,” 85.

30. “Scriptural Reasoning” is a contemporary practice of interfaith dialogue, primarily between Jews, Christians, and Muslims, which is centered on reading together the Scriptures of each tradition. See the *Journal of Scriptural Reasoning*. Online: <http://jsr.shanti.virginia.edu>.

of his argument (11:30–32): “Just as you [Gentiles] were once disobedient to God but have now [*nun*] received mercy because of their [Israel in part] disobedience, so they have now [*nun*] been disobedient in order that, by the mercy shown to you, they too may now [*nun*] receive mercy. For God has imprisoned all in disobedience so that he may be merciful to all.” Admittedly, the third “now” is missing in some manuscripts, but it is almost certainly original to Paul’s text because of the complementary destinies of both Gentile and Jew in Paul’s argument as recipients of divine mercy. The omission of the third “now,” and even in a few manuscripts its replacement by “later” [*hysteron*], surely attests subsequent scribal modification in the light of events, an attempt to deal with the difficulty that the response to the gospel had not been as Paul had apparently expected.

That Christians today live in situations and frames of reference (thought worlds, social imaginaries, and so on) not envisaged by the biblical writers is of course an uncontroversial recognition. For present purposes, the interesting questions relate to how best to sustain a dialectic between present and past in ways that do justice to both in terms of the reading of Scripture. Because historic Israel did not respond to the gospel in the way that Paul hoped for, how are Christians to understand and appropriate Paul’s discussion? One can, for example, envisage all time since Jesus as an eschatological now, a time in which God’s ultimate realities beyond history have been definitively revealed (in Jesus) within and are always impinging (through the Spirit) on history. Even if this sort of understanding may have some real affinities with Paul’s understanding of time, it could hardly, when almost two millennia have passed, be identical with it. If then affinity and continuity, rather than identity or exact correspondence, prove to be the categories in which Christian theology seeks to appropriate Scripture, how should these be related to the typical concern of the biblical scholar to establish precise textual meaning?

We conclude with some of the basic questions of theological interpretation of Scripture. How best do we synthetically integrate Pauline thought with that of the wider canon and of historic theology? How best do we articulate and exemplify the ways in which Scripture is both source and norm for theology? Although in a sense these are commonplace questions in Christian theology, it is perhaps more common in practice for people simply to adopt a particular stance rather than to reflect on it. It is a strength of Ticciati’s work that she raises fundamental hermeneutical questions in a sharp form.